

CREW OVERBOARD RECOVERY

By a single-handed crew

Developed by and for the Bonnell Cove Foundation's "SUDDENLY ALONE Seminar" which was first presented on April 7, 2001 in Mystic, CT.

SUBSECTIONS. This overview presents the basic elements for reacting to a Crew Overboard (COB) situation. These elements are involved in most recovery methods that successfully recover the victim. They are listed in the order that they are most likely to occur using *the Lifesling Type Recovery which is the only tested and proven method for a successful single-handed pickup of a COB*. It is important to read and understand this and other referenced documents on recovery, but most important is to practice. Doing these activities is very different from reading about them. A real situation is no time to learn and practice.

NOTE: Terms underlined are defined below.

1. *Getting buoyancy to the victim.* The best and most dependable way to do this is to wear floatation whenever there is a remote possibility that a person could fall overboard. If this doesn't happen, the remaining crew should throw readily available buoyant objects to the victim as soon as possible after he/she falls into the water. Doing this should not impede or slow the process of immediately heading the boat into the wind.
2. *Keeping the victim in sight.* The best way to do this is to keep the boat as close to the victim as possible. The preferred procedure for a sailboat is the Quickstop maneuver that is done by immediately heading the boat into the wind, and trimming the mainsail in while simultaneously deploying the Lifesling. If the remaining crew loses sight of the victim before contact is made the position must be marked by any available means, preferably a MOB Pole or MOM, and a GPS position recorded.
3. *Heading the boat back to the victim.* If visual contact is lost a search should be initiated centered around the MOB pole or the GPS MOB position and a MAYDAY message should be transmitted on the VHF radio.
4. *Stopping the boat alongside the victim.* Once the Lifesling is deployed the boat should be steered to circle the victim until he/she is in contact with the Lifesling or its tow rope. As soon as contact is made with the victim the boat is headed into the wind a second time and stopped while sails are lowered and the victim (in the Lifesling) is pulled alongside and tied securely to the boat's windward side, if possible.
5. *Making contact with the victim.* The Lifesling or a throw rope can be used to make contact with the victim at any time that the boat is close enough to throw either one of them to him/her.
6. *Getting the victim back aboard.* After the victim is tied securely to the boat and the sails are lowered, the victim can be hoisted aboard using the mechanical advantage of a block and tackle.

SEE LIFESLING™ INSTRUCTION MANUALS AND US SAILING PUBLICATIONS FOR DETAILED RESCUE GUIDELINES FOR THE LIFESLING-TYPE RECOVERY.

TERMS OF REFERENCE. This section expands the terms used by defining the

recommended piece of gear or procedure mentioned in the description of crew overboard recovery by a single handed sailor using the Lifesling Type of Recovery.

"wear floatation" USCG Approved Type 1 Automatic Inflatable PFD with built-in Harness equipped with crotch strap, light and loud whistle. Anything less than this is a compromise that should be carefully considered. The remaining crew should also wear floatation during the recovery.

"light" A combination strobe and steady light is recommended. Strobes confuse a helmsman when approaching a person in the water. A victim should shut off a strobe if he/she is able as the rescue boat approaches and turn on an incandescent light, if he/she has one.

"loud whistle" The Storm Safety Whistle is the loudest whistle you can buy.

"buoyant objects" A Type 1 Buoyant PFD kept in the cockpit expressly for a MOB situation, a horseshoe or life ring, floating cushions, or anything within reach of the helmsman that floats. This has two purposes: one is to provide floatation to the victim and the other is to visually mark the point where he/she went overboard. Throw buoyant objects even if they won't reach the victim. The victim can swim to them. See 'Victim Tips'.

"Quickstop maneuver" The process of stopping a boat under sail in the shortest time and distance from an overboard victim.

"trimming the mainsail in" If the boat is running or reaching when the person goes overboard the mainsheet should be trimmed to a close hauled position (near centerline) when the boat heads to windward during the Quickstop maneuver.

"Lifesling" A type of horseshoe floatation collar that is attached to a retrieval line and is prepared for use following the Lifesling Owners Preparation Guide.

"MOB Pole" A collective term that means a weighted pole that floats upright and holds a flag 6 feet above the water, a lifebuoy, with a drogue (sea anchor), a self igniting light, and a whistle all joined by floating line.

"MOM" Man Overboard Module. An inflatable MOB Pole that deploys all of the above gear in 20 seconds by pulling one handle.

"GPS position recorded" Every GPS has a Man Overboard (MOB) function that records the position when activated and gives range and bearing to the MOB thereafter. Each GPS is slightly different so you must read the manual and learn how to activate and use this function. After that a permanent MOB label should be put onto the GPS or immediately adjacent to it that tells exactly which buttons to push. Anyone can then activate and use the MOB function, day or night.

"search" Every boat should have a search plan laid out ahead of time and ready for instant use. Keep a diagram in the front of the log book or posted in an accessible place known to all aboard. Two popular plans are offered in the paper Crew Overboard Search Plans. Pick one and practice it.

"MAYDAY" If you circle the victim three times and have not made contact a MAYDAY call is recommended.

If you lose sight of the victim a MAYDAY call is recommended.

Have the MAYDAY message posted next to the VHF radio already filled in with boat identification information so all you have to do is add position and a situation description. This should be done ahead of time.

"VHF radio" Try to use the permanently installed VHF radio that has a masthead antenna. This is your best chance of reaching someone nearby who can come to your assistance.

"tow rope" The line attached to the boat with the Lifesling at the other end. This line is also called a "trailing line" or a "retrieval line".

"headed into the wind" Look at the relative wind indicator (Windex). Steer in the direction the arrow is pointing.

"sails are lowered" The furling jib is rolled in and secured and the mainsail is quickly dropped on deck or into lazy jacks or other sail handling equipment, if installed and rigged.

"tied securely" The retrieving line is tied to a cleat or other solid point on the boat close to the lifting position..

"windward side" Recommended so that the rescuer is not impeded by sails laying on deck or boom swinging on the downwind side and the victim is not injured by the boat drifting towards or over him/her.

"throw rope" A 'throwing sock' type of heaving line is recommended.

"block and tackle" The Lifesling Hoisting Tackle tailored to each vessel and stowed in a readily available place. This rig should be prepared following the Lifesling Preparation Guide found in this Workbook.

"Lifesling™ Instruction Manual" Each Lifesling is sold with an Instruction Manual which must be kept aboard as part of the conditions of USCG Approval. This manual provides rescue instructions for sail and power boats, proper retrieval line storage and hoisting tackle information.

THE UNCONSCIOUS/INJURED VICTIM

IF the victim wears an automatically inflated Type 1 PFD he/she should float face up.

IF you can maneuver the boat close enough you might be able to toss a line around and reach an attachment point for hoisting him/her aboard.

IF the victim has a crotch strap on the PFD/Harness combination you should be able to attach to both D rings on the harness and hoist him/her aboard without the harness slipping off.

IF you can get the Lifesling around the victim, facing forward, you might be able to hoist him/her aboard .

IF you have a dinghy in the water you might be able to partially deflate one side, get into the dinghy and haul the victim onto the dinghy. Please wear you own PFD and a safety line if you try this.

IF you had a sure way to re-board you could wear your PFD and a safety line and enter the water to attach a line or Lifesling to the victim. It might be a better idea to focus on getting help over the radio before you try this.

IF he/she stays tethered to the boat in the first place, this should not happen

VICTIM TIPS.

- Shout and try to attract attention as you are falling overboard.
- Don't swim after the boat. Swim to any floatation that is thrown over instead.
- Try to make yourself visible (Put hood up on foul weather gear, splash water around you, wave arms)
- Wait for the boat to circle you and look for the Lifesling and its retrieval/trailing line
- Keep clothing on, trapping air inside it if possible. Get rid of heavy non-buoyant items including boots that fill with water. Tighten your PFD and crotch strap, if they are loose.
- Let the Lifesling retrieval/trailing line slide through your hands until you reach the knots and bowline.
- Put the Lifesling over your head and under your armpits.
- Clip together the two sides of the buckle next to each D ring, if you can find them.
- If the boat starts to pull you through the water before it stops **TURN AROUND** so that you will be towed backwards keeping the wake out of your face. ***This can be the most dangerous part of the whole procedure and must be avoided.***
- If the Lifesling is equipped with a thigh strap pull it down from the outer circumference of the sling to a point under your knees, adjusting it for comfort just before you are hoisted aboard.
- Help the remaining crew get you aboard if you can but don't take the Lifesling off until you are on deck.
- If the boat misses you, or can't immediately find you, try to get to a MOB Pole or MOM if you see one
- Don't shout needlessly. Blowing a whistle is more likely to be heard aboard the rescue vessel.
- If you have to wait to be rescued assume the Heat Escape Lessening Posture (HELP) as much as possible. Keep a hat on, your head out of the water, arms against your sides and across your chest and PFD, and your lower legs crossed, knees together and raised as the seas permit.
- At night activate a personal strobe, if you have one, and leave it on until the rescue boat makes its approach to pick you up. At that point turn the strobe off so that the flashes do not disorient the helmsman and turn on an incandescent light if you have one.

POWER BOAT ADDENDUM (reprinted from The Lifesling Instructor's Manual)

This addendum is a suggestion for recovery of COB from a power boat. It should be noted that this is only a recommendation. Because of the different configurations of power boats available in the market each power boat skipper should work on and develop a method which works best for their boat. To help develop a recovery technique, attaching a fender to a bucket in the water to simulate a COB works well.

A. EQUIPMENT REQUIRED

1. Lifesling® prepared and stowed following The Lifesling Owner's Preparation Guide.
2. 5 to 1 Lifesling® block and tackle. Please note that a special 5 to 1 block and tackle has been developed especially for use in COB recovery on a power boat.
3. Lifting point such as a stainless steel eye mounted as high as possible on the boat and hopefully near a gate on the boat.

B. RECOVERY TECHNIQUE

Two methods of recovery can work for the power boat. The first method is to stop the boat immediately, turn the boat and approach the COB keeping the COB in sight at all times, approach to windward until the COB is abeam of the boat. Stop the boat and **SHUT DOWN THE ENGINE(S)** allowing the boat to drift down on the COB. Throw the Lifesling® to the COB. Pull the COB along side the boat tying the COB off on a cleat. Rig the 5 to 1 block and tackle to the lifting point (the portion with the cam cleat on the top) and then to the Lifesling® bowline, release the COB from the cleat and lift the COB on to the boat.

The second method of recovery of a COB in a power boat situation is not unlike a sailboat recovery. The same basic techniques used in sailboat recoveries except the engine is used for the recovery. Also it should be known maneuvering will be different if a boat is single or double screw.

This portion assumes that the steering station of the boat and the Lifesling® are stowed on the starboard side of the boat.

1. Stop the boat. Pull the throttle(s) back to idle, pull the gear shift(s) to neutral and then to reverse. Put full throttle(s) on to stop the boat. Once boat is stopped, pull the throttle(s) to idle and gear shift to neutral.
2. Once the boat is stopped, throw the Lifesling® into the water and then start turning to starboard keeping the COB in sight at all times. Circle the COB making sure that the boat does not come close to the COB.
3. When the COB acquires the Lifesling® or trailing line, **SHUT DOWN THE ENGINE(S)**, pull the COB along side the boat, open the gate if necessary, hook up the top (the portion with the cam cleat on the top) of the 5 to 1 block and tackle to the lifting point on the boat and the bottom to the eye of the bowline and lift the COB on to the boat.

KEEP IN MIND THAT WHILE YOU ARE ATTEMPTING TO RECOVER THE COB TO KEEP SAFELY AWAY FROM THE VICTIM BECAUSE THE TURNING OF THE SCREW(S) UNDER THE BOAT CAN BE EXTREMELY FRIGHTENING FOR THE VICTIM AND A PERSON CAN BE SEVERELY INJURED BY TURNING SCREW(S).

[BACK TO INDEX](#)